

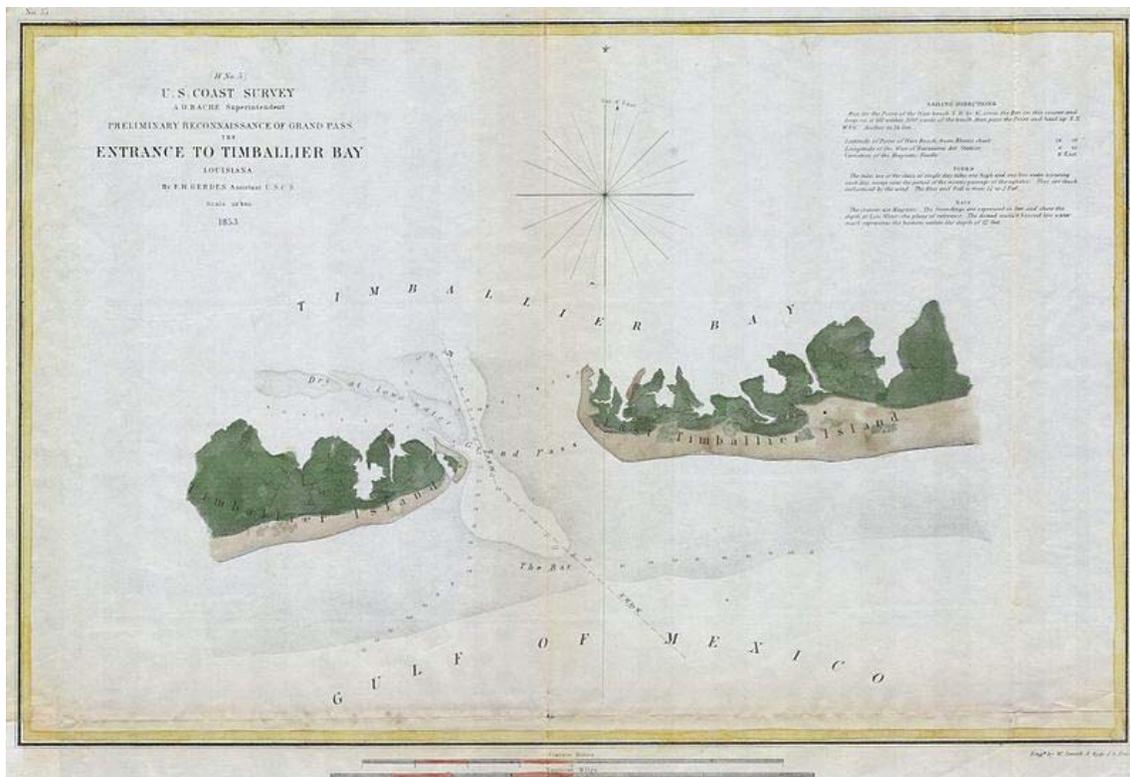
## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### Détours de Force

New Orleans and its environs have had some historic turnarounds. The city has survived fires, yellow fever, battles, military occupation, floods and (of course) hurricanes. Many times its fortunes have turned around in the right direction after untold hardship. Some turnarounds were a combination of moxie and mendacity.



*Timbalier Island and entrance to Timbalier Bay*

One interesting about-face occurred in the Louisiana colony during the time of hostilities with the Natchez Indians in 1729. A resourceful soldier named Sylvain Filiosa had been surrounded by the rapidly approaching war party and was seriously outnumbered. He thought quickly and began beating furiously upon a large kettledrum. The sound echoed so loudly that the Natchez stopped and gazed in alarm

at this seemingly menacing new weapon, and then they turned around and went in the other direction. Louis XV, after having been informed of this amusing tale, always referred to Filiosa as *Le Sieur Timbalier*, Sir Kettledrummer. Later Filiosa would reside and farm on a barrier island off the coast of Terrebonne Parish, naming his home Timbalier Island.



*Early Timbalier, or Kettledrummer*

An earlier turnaround transpired on the Mississippi at what the French would call a *détour*, or bend in the river. This momentous occasion took place on September 15, 1699, when Bienville and a just a handful of men in two canoes came up against the English corvette *Carolina Galley* (armed with twelve guns). The ship was anchored in the river (just a few miles below what would become New Orleans) awaiting favorable winds to take them further upstream. Bienville boldly informed Captain Lewis Bond (who had hoped to establish an English settlement on the river) to turn back to “whence he came”. A powerful well-fortified French threat awaited him upriver, he was assured.

This wasn't totally bluff and bluster on Bienville's part, since his brother Iberville had previously taken the English captain prisoner on Hudson Bay. Bond had met Bienville during that earlier encounter and respected the two brothers' acumen. Iberville, on the other hand, described Bond as “a scatterbrain full of English presumption”. Ever

since the English were “persuaded” to turn, that bend in the river has been known as *Détour des (aux) Anglais* (or *Détour à l’Anglais* as first mentioned in a letter by Henri de Tonti on March 4, 1700).

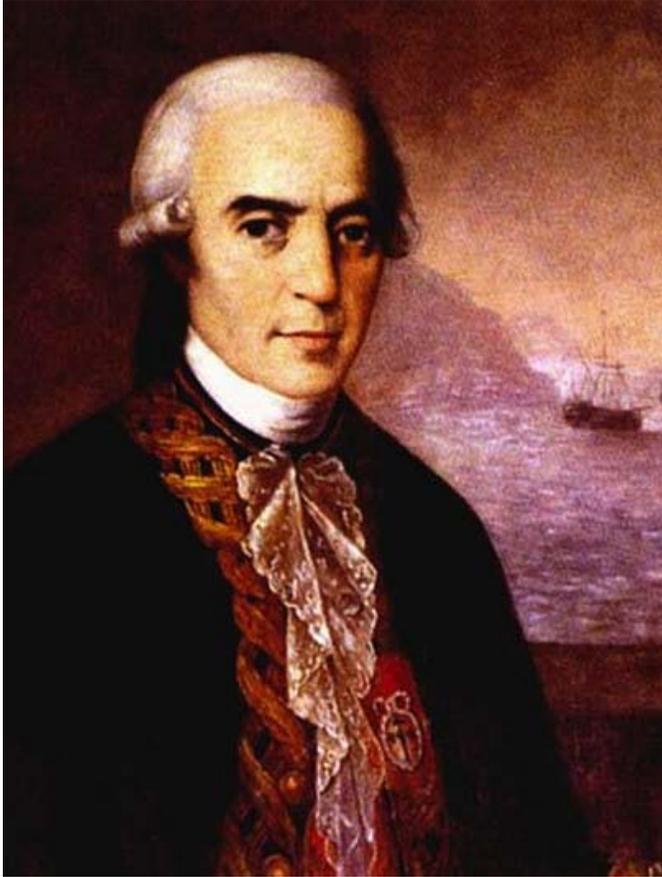


*Bienville, skilled at pointing out an alternative*

Détour in French has more than one meaning: taking the long way around to reach one’s destination (in Bond’s case this wasn’t an option) or that “bend in the river” meaning. The English version of the phrase is English Turn, which could easily mean that the English “turned” but it most likely means the “bend” where it all happened. Since 1988, English Turn has been the locale of stately homes where one can take a “turn” on the Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course.

Then there was Don Antonio de Ulloa, the first Spanish Governor of Louisiana (but not for long). Besides committing the ultimate *faux pas* of getting married and not inviting local guests to the wedding, he was an unwanted change. He was expelled by rebellion and told to turn around and go back home. This was not new to him, for years earlier his ship had been captured by British privateers. This turnaround made him a prisoner in London. Because he was a learned scientist and astronomer, he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in London. This honor facilitated his release and return to his native land. Ulloa was one of the first scientists to observe the properties of platinum

while in South America, and the meteorological term for a fog rainbow is called Ulloa's halo.



*Don Antonio de Ulloa, first Spanish Governor of Louisiana*

All of the above is true or the author would be a *chef menteur*, or chief liar in French, which begins to explain how the waterway, pass and highway obtained their names. The Choctaws called this bayou meandering alongside the present-day highway an *oulabe mingo*, or "big deceiver" in their language, because it flows in one direction and then turns around and flows the other way. This is due to the strong force of coastal tides. For a time, the Choctaws called Governor Kerlerec an *oulabe mingo*. He used to provide them with a generous supply of trade goods under their treaty terms. But when France's attention to the colony was diverted during the French and Indian War, the supplies ebbed and the governing chevalier's popularity with the tribe hit the skids. They were threatening to switch sides to the English. Finally Kerlerec's ship came in, the Choctaws loved him again and his reputation made another amazing turnaround. But it didn't last. Accused of stealing and dictatorial tendencies, the French threw him in the Bastille in 1763 after his recall. They exonerated him the year he died, 1770.

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